

Cultural Alterity in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*

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OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ENG-2024-13018382

Volume: 13

Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 20.10.2024

Accepted: 27.11.2024

Published Online: 01.12.2024

Citation:

Maryann, Rochelle. "Cultural Alterity in Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2024, pp. 74-80.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v13i1.8382>



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Abstract

Culture and society are closely related. It is very important as it plays a crucial role in shaping and forming an identity and determines the social environment of a nation. In course of time each society is made to think and believe that the practices and beliefs they have carried forth are right and ought to be followed. Though people are educated, they still adhere to the stringent cultural practices. This is because of the environment and the thoughts instilled in them right from the time of their birth.

Cultures have evolved from time immemorial. In course of time each society is made to think and believe that the practices and beliefs they have carried forth are right and ought to be followed. Though people are educated, they still adhere to the stringent cultural practices. This is because of the environment and the thoughts instilled in them right from the time of their birth.

The theory of alterity has become a philosophical concept that is an offshoot of post-modernism. The notion of alterity holds good to understand the formation as individuals and social beings. Alterity has a wide range of approaches to epistemology, psychoanalysis social and cultural theory. In the contemporary world everyone encounters the 'other' which has increased through globalization and mass media.

There are eight dualisms of alterity (1) the popular other (2) the lower-class other (3) the black other (4) Third World other (5) the female other (6) the national or ethnic other (7) oppressed parts of subjectivity as the other and (8) somewhere else as the other place. In this way the tag leads us to see the colonial other which is never layered without differences and further places him or her in the margins when representing them.

Cultural alterity is that which is associated with different cultures, gender, classes and other social branches and the manner in which society thinks about them and views them. In the contemporary thinking, alterity focuses on 'otherness'. The 'other' in scholarship includes the Jews, homosexuals, insane, sick, women and other heterogeneous groups who have been commonly marginalized. The construction of the otherness can be detected on the basis of suffering and injustice.

This paper examines the play 'Dance Like A Man' by Mahesh Dattani is based on the theory of cultural alterity. This play discusses how even the male is subdued under patriarchy even though they want to break free from such stringent norms. There are rules drawn how a girl should be and a boy should be. What each gender is expected to learn. In this play Jayaraj is a Bharatanatyam dancer and is suppressed by his father because according to his father Amritlal dance is only for women and not for men because he feels his son emits effeminate expressions. This is the cultural frame which is instilled in the minds of people from inception and people think in those terms. This paper shows how Jayaraj is seen and treated as the 'other' by his father and because he is seen as 'the other' he becomes a drunkard and loses his son thus he becomes an unsuccessful dancer.

Keywords: Culture, Gender, Dance, Society, Other, Patriarchy

Culture is a contributing factor and so is the society in shaping the minds and stations of people towards gender places and preferences. Gender difference is in seminanted in society through a number of ways and sources. Tradition, religion, legal and profitable systems play an important part in determining gender places. These lay the rules for social morals and geste and encourage one to fit into the dominant culture. As Wole Soyinka says, 'Culture is a matrix of horizonless possibilities and choices. From within the same culture matrix we can prize arguments and strategies for the declination and ennoblement of our species, for its servility an demancipation, for the repression of its productive eventuality or its improvement.'

The culture of India is among the world's oldest, reaching back to about five centuries. Numerous Indian traditional sources describe it as 'Sa Prathama Sanskrati Vishvavara' the first and the supreme culture in the world. India is a veritably different country, and different regions have their own distinct societies. India is a country known for its concinnity in diversity, with numerous persuasions, languages and varied people who follow and have their own artistic and social individualities. India as a nation in the history was exposed to other societies (Western culture) because of the social rule and in the present day world; it's part of the globalization. Numerous changes have come into effect among the multilateral societies of the nation but at the same time, certain artistic conceptions haven't been overcome. There still exists several artistic taboos that education or globalization have failed to abolish from social practices. These collide with changes that societies have else espoused for progress.

Artistic practices also denoted specific places and profession for the manly and womanish in society. They made rules similar as the choice of professions for the manly and the womanish. The existent is noway given a choice to pursue a profession of his/ her want. They always have to live and please society. Charolotte Davis Kasl in her views said patriarchy, scale, and capitalism produce, encourage, maintain, and immortalize dependence and reliance. Patriarchy and scale are grounded on domination and submission, which affect in fear. This fear is expressed by the dominators through control and violence, and in subordinated people through passivity and suppression of wrathfulness.

The external conflict of scale between dominants and inferiors becomes internalized in individualities, creating particular inner chaos, anxiety and duality. To quell the inner conflict people resort to addicting substances and geste. This composition analyses the play *Dance Like a Man* which conceptions, professions or interests in people grounded on their gender and how society judges people grounded on their professions. The proposition of Cultural Alterity is used for analysis. *Dance Like a Man* is a play that highlights the artistic alterity that a manly faces in a society that considers cotillion as an art form meant for the womanish. Jairaj chooses cotillion as his

profession and hereafter it's a struggle over societal demands and inflictions.

Dattani in an interview explained how he'd been learning the classical cotillion of Bharatnatyam for six times, when in his twenties, from exponents US Krishna Rao and his woman Chandrabhaga Devi. They tutored him to have a passion for cotillion, which coloured his theatre as well. The idea of this play came from there (Banerjee and Dattani). This play is set in a time when dancing was considered a harlot's profession. It explores the artistic insincerity towards the art and the acceptance of cotillion as a profession for a joker.

Jairaj's father, Amritlal Parekh, a tone placarded social leftist belongs to the transitional generation; the bone who witnessed the pre-independence and post-independence struggles in the Indian society Dattani describes him as are volutionist, who brings in reforms in the society still when his son Jairaj took to dancing he was apprehensive to support his decision as his artistic parenting forbade him to accept a dancing career for a joker.

Jairaj hence went against the wishes of his father and pursued cotillion still he was unfit to support his woman Ratna and himself and returned to his father. Jairaj and Ratna were obsessed with cotillion that they lost their son Shankar. This autocratic gender poisoned father who's a tone placarded social leftist actually contributes to the in glorious practice of untouchability in the name of reform. The couple wanted to make their daughter Lata a great cotillion and also wanted their intended son-in-law to allow her to continue her profession. Lata decided not to have any children till she reached the height of her dancing career.

Ratna was shame faced of the death of their son Shankar and Jairaj always teased her with that. Jairaj was present when the double dose of opium was administered to the child and inversely participated the guilt. The death of their child bound them to partake the tragedy together. Dattani gave a twist to the play when he doesn't show or condemn the woman alone who's caught under the despotism of patriarchy but also includes the men who are bound under the patriarchal structures. In this play Jairaj was treated as the 'other' by his father who was confused about the stage he'd to take with regard

to his son's profession. Amritlal formerly asked him where his cotillion was going to lead him. He didn't like Jairaj dancing because society considered dance as effeminate and wasn't respectable for man to pursue it as a career. As someone who took part in the freedom struggle Amritlal wanted his son to have a good profession. This could be so because Amritlal was brought up and instructed in a culture which could considered dance as not suited for a man.

AMRITLAL: (...) Why must you dance? It doesn't give you any income. It's because of your wife? Is she forcing you to dance?

JAIRAJ: Nobody's forcing me.

AMRITLAL: She may be by influencing you. Maybe it's her, not you. That's one thing I regret. Consenting to your marriage. (37)

Amritlal followed the cultural practice of holding on to the sons indeed even after marriage. He blamed his daughter-in-law Ratna for Jairaj's obsession with dance. He didn't want to condemn his son directly but in a truly patriarchal behavior blamed his Ratna. He protested to the presence of the Guruji in his home,

AMRITLAL: I want this din to stop. I want Guruji out, that's what I want.

JAIRAJ: You'll just have put up with it for some more time.

RATNA: (comes out of the dance hall). Are you coming? Guruji is waiting. He wants you to do the jathiswaram with me again.

AMRITLAL: Tell him he is occupied for the time being.

RATNA: Jai?

JAIRAJ: In a minute, Ratna.

RATNA: You know what he is like when he gets annoyed (Exits. Mimes talking to Guruji and musicians) (35).

This discussion exemplifies Amritlal's sectarianism to his son and daughter-in-law dancing in his house. The sound of the music, the knee socks, the climate and overall his son dancing rankled him. He wanted them all out. Ratha aggravated the script when she called Jairaj to learn a new dance form and claimed him on coming soon. This rankled Amritlal indeed more but shows Jairaj and Ratna's absolute obsession with dance.

AMRITLAL: I'm expecting some people and I want those musicians out before they arrive.

JAIRAJ: They will leave when your guests come, I assure you.

AMRITLAL: I want them out now (35)

Amritlal was truly clear that he wanted the troop and the dance guru to leave, before his guests could come because he didn't want them to know that his house was used for dance. It would be scorned by society and a disgrace for his status as a revolutionist to say that his son rehearsed dance with them.

Dattani expose show the Indian family is erected upon the patriarchal structure. He shows us how the autocratic father tries to check the movements and mores of his son and his daughter-in-law, although the father is considered as a man of progressive ideas and liberal views. The play dramatizes the conflict between the aged and the youth through the characters of the old father and the immature son. The family ties and marriage discord are stressed through a series of conflicts among the members of a single family. Amritlal Parekh upholds the traditional values, whereas his son Jairaj seeks to erect it through his course of actions.

JAIRAJ: I can't even have a decent rehearsal in this house.

AMRITLAL: You can't have a decent rehearsal in this house? I can't have some peace and quiet in my house! It's bad enough having had to convert the library into a practice hall for you (36)

Amritlal didn't like the Guruji having long hair and because of this his image about him wasn't good. He had the ancient notion that only women grew their hair and sadhus had long hair.

AMRITLAL: Why does he wear his hair so long?

JAIRAJ: Why do you ask?

AMRITLAL: I have never seen a man with long hair.

JAIRAJ: All sadhus have long hair.

AMRITLAL: I don't mean men. I mean normal men.

JAIRAJ: What are you trying to say?

AMRITLAL: All I'm saying is that normal men don't keep their hair so long (39).

When Ratna told him that Jairaj had decided to grow his hair this infuriates him indeed more.

RATNA: Oh he told you?

AMRITLAL: What?

RATNA: That he is planning to grow his hair long? It would enhance his abhinaya.

AMRITLAL: I see. And was that his idea or maybe yours?

RATNA: Actually, it was Guruji's suggestion.

AMRITLAL: Tell him that if he grows his hair even an inch longer, I will shave his head and throw him on the roads. (40)

Jairaj and Ratna were unable to cope with the interferences of Amritlal and decide to leave and fend for themselves.

JAIRAJ: (to Ratna) Come on. I've packed some of your clothes. We're leaving.

RATNA Where?

JAIRAJ: We'll decide that later. (Gives Ratna the bundle.) (46)

Amritlal knew that they were dependent on him and took advantage of the situation and gave them a piece of his mind which is expressed in this long passage which states the dominance of patriarchy.

AMRITLAL: (...) I realize, of course, that you have come back more out of necessity than any real intention of patching up what you have undone. I don't mind. It doesn't give me much pleasure to know that, but ... I don't mind. And I don't gain much pleasure by reminding you that you had vowed never to come back to this house. No, I won't remind you of that. I am above it. But I definitely mind your silence. It carries too much hate. It never was my intention to get you to hate me. What parent would want that from his children? So I have changed my mind. I will allow you to dance. And I shall be very happy if you can earn your livelihood from it. If you ask me for money, I shall not refuse but I will be disappointed. I have been wise enough to invest my money in the right places. But don't think you have a right to all my wealth. I have far better things to do with it than hand it over to you. You may carry on using my library as your practice hall and your guru may come here twice a week in the mornings. I hope I have made myself clear. (No response.) Have I made myself clear? (48)

Amritlal Parekhina truly skillful and politic manner learnt from Ratna how good Jairaj was in dance and wanted to stop him from it completely. When he learnt that he wasn't as good as Ratna, he subsidized on this and told her that he would allow her to dance, if she stopped Jairaj. This is what Ratna wanted to dance all her life and agreed to Amritlal. Ratna married Jairaj not only because he was a dancer but mainly for the fact that he allowed her to pursue dance.

AMRITLAL: It is hard for me to explain. I leave it to you. Help me and I'll never prevent you from dancing. I know it will take time but it must be done.

RATNA: I will try.

AMRITLAL: You'll have to do better than that.

RATNA (more definite): All right (51)

Ratna was learning dance from a devdasi but she would lie to Amritlal and would say that she

was going to the temple. When he came to know about her he was in a rage because devdas is weren't respected in society. Devadas is performed the dance of Bharatnatyam in the temple. They were paid for their services by the temple authorities. Gradually, the devdas is were sexually exploited to satisfy the desires of the priests and rich people, thus this spoils the image of devadas is. In this way, a stigma was associated with their lives and their profession, Bharatnatyam was greatly discouraged on the explanation that it was too amorous. In an interview to Rana Uniya, Dattani said, 'It's a courtesan's cotillion and people from respectable families didn't perform or exercise that cotillion form. It's twice delicate for the man. You know, what business a man has learning a hookers's cotillion. So it brings about gender places, what's anticipated of gender as well. And also the pressures between couple and how, they break, how they felt that they used their relationship to develop their careers, balls and how they attune to the fact that the time wasn't right for them'.

Through the illustration of devdasi, Chennai Amma, Dattani tries to explain how a prejudiced society fails to respond to the call of humanity and admit true art. Amritlal didn't like his daughter-in-law Ratna's association with a devdasi and learning the art of cotillion at her house as he feared of losing his family character. The play highlights the smirch that clings to the life of a devdasi, the cotillion of the tabernacle. Indeed Amritlal, the leftist couldn't bring his mind to overcome the artistic taboo.

JAIRAJ: Reform! Don't talk about reform. (38)

Amritlal's study was that supporting and allowing them to exercise their art would be an circular stimulant for open prostitution, but Jairaj had a high regard and respect for them and their art. Amritlal held truly different views and beliefs that it had nothing to do with their art and engaged in trading of blood and meat. So they aren't suitable for temples.

AMRITLAL: I will not have our temples turned into brothels!

JAIRAJ: And I will not have my art run down by a handful of stubborn narrow-minded individuals with fancy pretentious ideals. (38)

Amritlal also tried to control the movement and mores of Ratna. In this way, the clash between the

tradition and the fustiness heightened. Amritlal knew that Ratna visited a devdasi rather of going to temple.

AMRITLAL: You know very well where, because that's where you go every Monday! (Ratna does not respond.) It was fortunate for me that it was Patel who saw you going there. I can trust him to keep his mouth shut. He called me, out of concern for our family name.

RATNA: I haven't done anything to spoil the family name. (41)

Further,

RATNA: Yes. My husband knows where I go and have his permission. (43)

Jairaj and Ratna were so involved in cotillion that they lost their son Shankar. So everytime Jairaj got drunk the formerly hurt and failures were reawakened and there were addresses about his demise due to their sheer negligence. Both were the cause of his death.

RATNA: (...) He usually wakes up at this hour.

JAIRAJ: Not on the nights you perform.

RATNA: What do you mean?

JAIRAJ: The ayah.

RATNA: (alternately): Go on.

JAIRAJ: You wouldn't know. An old trick banded down from one generation of ayahs to the next. I know. I was raised by one.

RATNA: (grimly). Opium (72)

Jairaj too was in the know of things and was indirectly responsible for Shankar's death. The guilt eroded at him and made him a failure. The worst personality or reduction was from his father that made him a wreck.

AMRITLAL: A woman in a man's world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic (60)

Though Jairaj and Ratna weren't suitable to make a mark, they tried to do their best for their daughter Lata.

Lata was a girl who didn't follow the marriage-children- stay at home patriarchal norm. She was a career acquainted girl and concentrated completely with determination on her career as a cotillion. She's portrayed as a woman of the present generation, who are bold and confident to break away from age old artistic practices.

LATA: When I was a little girl, I used to stand near the door and watch mummy and daddy practise. It was magic for me. I knew then what I wanted to be. (6)

Lata's high focus was cotillion, indeed children and family life were secondary to her. She's depicted as a persisting girl who wanted to be an achiever, because if she had children she'd also be bound to the house. She had a clear plan for her life and career.

LATA: And we won't have.

VISWAS: And we won't have ... what?

LATA: I mean, not right away. We can have them later, can't we?. (6)

Ratna's first stage performance was a success, this was because of all the work and support given by her parents.

RATNA (shouting): I heard. Rave reviews! The star of the festival! The dancer of the decade! And why shouldn't she get reviews like these? I deserved it. Spending sleepless nights arranging things. Sweet-talking the critics. My hard work has paid off, hasn't it? Hasn't it?. (65)

Ratna went that spare hence to make the path straight for her son advertisement make her debut performance to be a grand success.

RATNA: Yes! I wish Lata more fame than we have had. Why, she can be the best! We just have to push her a bit and, with our experience behind her, she can't fail. Yes. I'll do anything to see that she reaches the top. (33)

Ratna goes further and makes her career successful, she doesn't want Lata to be a failure, like them. They don't want to be a stumbling block or let there be any hurdles in her career. Ratna and Jairaj were submerged into dance that they didn't mind what kind of boy Lata marries, as long as he allowed her to dance.

The play shows how patriarchal social set up deprives the other members of the families from getting a celebrity dance. Ratna couldn't be a notorious dance under the patriarchal powers exercised by her father-in-law. Dattani sounded to assert that an individual can noway flourish under the domination of patriarchal family system. Ratna thwarted her dream of being a celebrity. After the death of Amritlal Parekh, her daughter Lata became an excellent star of Bharatnatyam. Viswas was unfit to accept Lata's performance. This was so because Viswas was brought up under the patriarchal morals and unfit to accept multitudinous rates in Lata. He too had stereo typed perceptions about dance and was unable to accept her profession. Viswas didn't know to see dance as an art and appreciate it.

VISWAS: Well, it was tenderly intense and intensely tender and all that. But ...

JAIRAJ: But what? You didn't like her interpretation? What did you want her to do? Talk to her parrot while she is waiting? (...)

LATA: What was it that you didn't like?

VISWAS: It was too erotic (...)

JAIRAJ: But you think you know enough to pass judgement.

VISWAS: I'm not passing judgement. I simply gave my opinion, that's all (...)

JAIRAJ: (...) You don't want Lata dancing erotic numbers. (60)

This portrays that Viswas wasn't suitable to see art and value it and saw Lata's performance in a pessimistic manner. When Lata hears this she doesn't give into the wishes or adapt or change herself to the prospects of 'her man' as it is the practice in our culture. Lata defends herself.

LATA (to VISWAS). Do you want to stop me? You can't (60)

There was a clash between tradition and agelessness in Lata and Viswas. He was a more conservative and exposed the culture of the society. He doesn't authorize Lata dancing amorous numbers because society shouldn't ingrain her and that shouldn't bring a black mark to him or his family. Jairaj was more open in his way of thinking when compared to Viswas.

JAIRAJ: My wife danced that same item thirty years ago.

VISWAS: I admire her courage (59)

Jairaj allowed his woman to dance because he saw dance as an art.

Thirty years ago he was truly broad inclined enough to allow Ratna to dance. On the contrary Viswas indeed after thirty years couldn't put his education into practice but still held tight to the morals of patriarchy. Although educated the conservative parenthood and the direct thinking that they were exposed to, prevented change.

Dattani's factory display the theme of frustrations antedating from the conservative and conventional cultural morals and perceptions. The play also shows cerebral conflict performing from out of a strong desire to come public celebrities. The play has been designed in such away that it leaves no room for misconception in our visual generality of

a scene. This is important because *Dance Like a Man* alternates between history *Dance Like a Man* alternates between history and present events. Dattani expertly brings out the clash between tradition and agelessness. It has been hailed as awful and gripping play that displays deep concern for family harmony and approach for a social reformation, which makes it a unique piece of art.

The play ends with a compromising tone. They survive by making concession with their revolutionary and rebellious spirit. The concluding lines of the play say it all

'We were only human. We lacked the grace. We lacked the brilliance. We lacked the magic to dance like God.' (74).

In Little Dubey's observation, the play is beautifully drafted the way it moves back and forth in time, its use of one actor to play further than one part which really tests the actors gift, makes it as unique as does the strong characterization and the 'indefectible' movement in time. Literature suggests; it doesn't state. A good work of art has rich suggestive point.

The play *Dance Like a Man* has psycho-philosophical implications and suggestions. The communication is decrypted in the runner by the dramatist, but it's deciphered by the stage product of the play. The vivacity of dialogues and performance enables the dramatist to unfold his story in an effective and fascinating manner. Dattani's characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the rough weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire.

The play shows how Jairaj as a man was bound under patriarchy, unable to break free from its chains. He was treated as the other by his father who pretended to be broad minded to society but was just the opposite to his son. The play also shows how Dance and devdasis as stereotyped by society. All the rigid norms must be broken by education and awareness and people must be accepted for the way they solely as a 'Human'.

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